



**Presenting Compassionate Conservatism in PMQ Genre: David Cameron's
Questioning Performance in the Staged Verbal Duel with Tony Blair**

by

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ATTESTATION

I have read and understood The University of Edinburgh guidelines on Plagiarism and declare that this dissertation is all my own work except where I indicate otherwise by proper use of quotes and references.

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ABSTRACT

Modern British political arena is witnessing a radical reform in the Conservative party, ever since David Cameron's leadership election in 2005. Compassionate Conservatism is promoted as the essential reforming ideology for attracting electorate support to regain the government. Through progressive approaches of limiting the government and empowering individuals and society, David Cameron has made great progress in rebuilding the party to be a center-right party representative of the wide British public.

This paper studies the construction of the new Conservative party ideology, Compassionate Conservatism, from political linguistic angle. Prime Minister's Question Time (PMQ) is chosen as the crucial channel for detailed analysis using critical discourse analysis approaches. This paper firstly examines PMQ as a highly institutionalized genre where the verbal exchange between the PM and the Opposition leader is constrained. Secondly, the view of dynamic power relations is maintained in analyzing the macro and micro discourse features of David Cameron's questioning performance in combating Tony Blair in the adversarial PMQ discourse. Thirdly, the analysis further demonstrates that beyond the practice of debate and dispute, Cameron's questioning discourse also has the effect of projecting the reforming party ideology of Compassionate Conservatism.

It is concluded that both textual features and pragmatic functions of Cameron's questioning discourse has the essential role in combating Blair's challenges and constructing the desired image for the Conservative party and leadership. This study necessitates future studies of political linguistics to investigate British party politics through the crucial genre of PMQ.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Contemporary British political arena has witnessed three heavy defeats of the Tories since the 1997 electorate success of the New Labour party. It is clear that the British Tories cannot resurrect by simply relying on traditional Conservative beliefs in the present political climate. The whole party faces the unprecedented challenge of substantial ideological transformation. Ever since his election to the leadership of the Conservative Party, David Cameron has made great efforts in promoting the political ideology of ‘Compassionate Conservatism’¹ to provide the party with a modernized, coherent and populist image.

According to the assertion of Duncan Fraser (2007:87-9), David Cameron’s political reforming approaches include both the preservation of traditional Conservative values of ‘order, authority and property’, and the promotion of modern liberalism perspectives of ‘decentralization, local democracy and social responsibility.’ Cameron’s political ideas have achieved great political headway in centering the party ideology and winning electorate support. David Cameron’s leadership has been commented by a right wing MP as ‘Cameron ticks all the right boxes’² for getting the Conservatives back into government. Meanwhile, the flourishing of modern Conservatives and Cameron’s leadership has drawn increasing attention from the current Labour government. Among all the political sound and fury, the genre of Prime Minister’s Question Time (PMQ) is the first and foremost arena for combating and debating between the modern Conservatives and New Labour; between David Cameron and Tony Blair. The close relationship between language and politics, as argued by various scholars (O’Barr, 1976; Wilson, 1990; Bourdieu, 1991), has basically informed this study for analyzing the reforming Conservative party ideology through the staged verbal duel between David Cameron and Tony Blair in PMQ genre.

Previous literature has been found in scrutinizing contemporary politics through

media genres, such as political interviews, public speeches, party conferences and political documentaries; however, few is on approaching political party ideology through the crucial genre of PMQ. As a kind of institutionalized genre, PMQ has both predictable and spontaneous features (Harris, 2001). In terms of high predictability, MPs have to be called upon by the Speaker to ask questions; thus problematic turn-takings have rare occurrences in PMQ genre. The Opposition leader has the privilege of asking more questions than common MPs. In terms of high spontaneity, there is no prior notice of question topics, which are usually performed to well represent MPs' political perspectives and concerns. Therefore, this study chooses PMQ interactions as a convenient channel for gaining a comprehensive view of the verbal duel between Tony Blair and David Cameron and the reforming party ideology of Compassionate Conservatism delivered through Cameron's questioning performance.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach is employed to analyze data of Cameron-Blair verbal duel in 52 PMQ sessions from 7 Dec, 2005 to 27 Jun 2007. The research objective of this study is to investigate how David Cameron effectively employs questioning strategies in an attempt to undermine the discursive position of the PM and Labour government in PMQ discourse. Further, this study will explore how David Cameron presents himself and the Conservative party as Compassionate Conservatives in the staged verbal exchanges with Tony Blair. This study holds that Cameron's questioning strategies should be understood in relation to values and ideology which he shares with Conservative MPs. Therefore, the textual and pragmatic analysis on Cameron's questioning is combined with wider consideration of the socio-political context of both pre-Cameron and Cameron Conservative party politics.

Through analyzing the new Tory leader's performance in the important genre of PMQ, this paper attempts to concretely examine questioning strategies and the image-building process of David Cameron. By doing so, this paper acknowledges the

essential pragmatic role of political questioning in shaping political debates and political process of the British parliament. It is concluded that Cameron's questioning with featured discursive strategies effectively accentuates the reforming party ideology of Compassionate Conservatism, which is a coherent mixture of one-nation Conservative discourse and modern liberal discourse. This study acknowledges that Prime Minister's Question Time is a crucial genre in examining British party politics, and necessitates future researches in investigating contemporary political discourse through the important medium of political questions.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1. The dialectic relation between language and politics

In our age there is no 'keeping out of politics'. All issues are political issues.

—George Orwell³

With a boost by mass media, politics nowadays is increasingly acknowledged as a crucial field in everyday life settings. The political field, as pointed out by Bourdieu (1977:71), is practically 'a field of forces and a field of struggles aimed at transforming the relation of forces which confers on this field its structure at any given time'. Language, being the essential communicative medium of this force for transformation, maintains a dialectic relation with politics, which justifies the current study of Compassionate Conservatism discourse through David Cameron's language use in PMQ discourse.

Language and politics are dialectically related, meaning that they are two different but not discrete entities. Their relation is clearly explicated by William O'Barr's observation that language and politics are in mutual interaction, feeding back upon one another (O'Barr, 1976:5). As a product of traditional notation of party politics

and party political programs (Fetzer & Weizman, 2006:148), politics not only invests ideological motivation in language, but also imposes socio-contextual requirements on language. This assertion is supported by the observation that politicians own special access to political capital (Bourdieu, 1991:194). Bourdieu (1991) asserts that non-professionals must acquire a new form of cultural capital to ‘crack the code’ of the language used by professional politicians. The significance of language in the field of sophisticated politics is concretely supported by the observation that ‘political activity does not exist without the use of language. It is true that other behaviors are involved: for instance, physical coercion. But the doing of politics is predominantly constituted in language’ (Chilton & Schaffner, 2002:3). Language constitutes the prerequisite of multifarious strategies deployed in politics, which is universally known as the competitive field of power. Language is also the medium of main strategies in party politics, including coercion, representation and misrepresentation, and legitimization and delegitimization (Wilson, 1990). Furthermore, contextualized by political party ideology, language is essentially the communication system for creating a new ideology to affect people’s perceptions and perspectives. It is in that sense that certain values promoted by a particular party later become a public consensus (Jones & Stilwell Peccei, 2003:32).

Articulation of political systems and structures through political discourse has undergone changes in contemporary society, owing to substantial impact from the media and the public. Fetzer and Weizman suggest that the meaning negotiation in contemporary politics is not just a government business, but rather a conversation between the political field and the mediatized public field:

Due to media-contextual constraints and requirements regarding the audience’s inferencing processes involved in media-discourse comprehension, as well as the staging of politics and politicians, the primarily monologue-oriented mode of discourse, which prevailed in the fifties, sixties, seventies and eighties, is no longer considered to be appropriate in the western and Anglo-American contexts.

(Fetzer & Weizman, 2006:146)

In contemporary political discourse, language use of politicians not only coordinates political structure and operation, but also is clearly oriented to the public. In this way, Fairclough (1998:147) notes that the political discourse of professional politicians has a duality of constraints of being 'internally determined' by the political context of party political processes and ideology, and 'externally determined' by the socio-context of mediated public discourse delivered through broadcast talk. Therefore, the skill of a politician lies in his or her competence to effectively deliver party ideology and perspectives in ways that appeal to diverse and generic mass-media audiences. It is further noted that influencing people's perspectives through mediated public discourse is not merely through multifarious rhetorical strategies, but rather largely through politicians' charismatic appeals or so-called style. In this sense, the order of contemporary political discourse is an evident 'dialogue-oriented' (Fetzer & Weizman, 2006:146) text in regard to communication.

2.2. The dynamics of identity in contemporary political discourse

Goffman (1973) first propounded a comprehensive framework modeling the dynamic nature of identity in everyday social interactions, which has basically informed the current study on politicians' identity in communication. Identity dynamics is vividly explicated by Goffman's metaphorical illustration that 'in talk it seems routine that, while firmly standing on two feet, we jump up and down on another' (Goffman, 1981:155). Holding a constructionist viewpoint, Goffman recognizes the 'performative' nature of 'self', an assumed identity of social actors which is shaped by the environment and audience. In the business of verbal communication, speakers adopt different 'footings' which constantly shift according to specific communicative needs (Goffman, 1981). Everyday interaction is compared to a competing arena where individuals employ various communicative strategies and resources to sell their

desired image (Goffman, 1973:30). This requires them either to comply with or to combat their various situationally pre-allocated roles (Goffman, 1997). The preoccupation with 'image-building' in social practices is also the ideological drive for individuals' diverse style-expressions.

Further, style, as viewed by Fairclough (2003:159), is the discoursal aspect of ways of being identities. Fairclough maintains that the identification process is a textual process constructed and represented by discourse. Based on Goffman's proposition, Fairclough further divided the notion of 'identity' into social identity and personal identity and suggested that the relationship between these two facets of identity remains dialectic, as demonstrated in the following words:

Achieving social identity in a full sense is a matter of being capable of assuming social roles but personifying them, investing them with one's own personality (or personal identity), enacting them in distinct way...Becoming a personality is a matter of being able to formulate one's primary and ultimate concerns, and to balance and prioritize one's social roles in terms of these. (Fairclough, 2003:160-1)

Constrained by social roles and values, an individual employs various sociolinguistic resources to foster a compelling style. Moreover, Fairclough asserted that 'the order of discourse' in social activities is composed of a dynamic network of style, genre, and discourse. Thus, style presentation can be observed and analyzed at different levels of abstraction of genre and discourse (Fairclough, 2003:163, 206). This assertion has provided an essential framework for pinning down the complexity of politicians' image-building processes in political discourses.

Specifically, owing to the mediated and public characteristics of contemporary political discourse as reviewed above, political figures are not transmitted as one-dimensional identity only (Fetzer & Weizman, 2006:148); rather projecting

multiple-dimensional identity in different communicative events. The ways by which politicians establish their favored image involves the important concept of 'institutional discourse', which is a representation of 'the interplay between individuals' interactional and discursive role and their institutional status' (Thornborrow, 2002:5). In diverse institutional discourses of politics such as political interviews and conferences, politicians' desired image is constructed through combining the private personal version and the professionalized public version of identity through their language use (Langer, 1981; Tolson, 1991; Thornborrow, 2001). According to 'status expectation' by the generic mass audience (O'Barr, 1976:416), politicians implicitly move along the speech continuum of lifeworld discourse and political discourse to present the desired style and gain public support. It also helps to deliberate on Bourdieu's reference to 'cultural capital' of professional politicians. This means theoretically that a person endowed with delegated capital can still obtain personal capital through a subtle strategy of distancing himself from the institution as far as possible, while still belonging to it and keeping correlative advantages (Bourdieu, 1991:196).

2.3. The dynamics of control and resistance in the institutional discourse of PMQ

Politics has been intrinsically connected with power ever since the appearance of governance system. Predominantly, political ends are achieved through physical coercion and verbal control (O'Barr, 1976:418). There exists a dynamics of control and resistance in diverse institutional discourses of politics. Therefore, an examination of political discourse is primarily on investigating discursive strategies for claiming power.

In institutional discourse, power distribution among co-participants is inherently asymmetrical and shifting, which has been closely documented in previous researches (Fowler, 1985; Harris, 1991; Hutchby, 1996; Haworth, 2006). As theoretically

modeled by Foucault (1972; 1980), power does not belong to any interlocutor while lacked by another; rather it is continually constructed, resisted, mediated, and shifted around by interlocutors within the institutional discourse hierarchy. Moreover, the dynamics for control and resistance, as maintained by Fisher (1984:202), must comply with the organizational constraints of particular settings. Therefore, actual communication in institutional settings is far more complex than in ordinary face-to-face settings, which has been explicated by Scannell's observation that 'an essential difference is that, in institutional contexts, turns at talk are pre-allocated according to established distributions of performative roles' (Scannell, 1998:259).

As a special institutional genre, PMQ has its own sociolinguistic rules, which much regulate the practice of questioning by Members of Parliament and answering by the Prime Minister in the formal setting of the House of Commons. According to Chilton (2004:92), the institution of PMQ has officially been recognized since 1961 as an important sub-genre of parliamentary discourse and primary contestatory arena for British political parties. As the key event of the parliamentary week⁴, the institution of PMQ has greatly shaped the political debate in British party politics. Moreover, PMQ is also known for coercing the Prime Minister into revealing information or showing weakness (Chilton, 2004:109), and for fierce verbal duel between the PM and the leader of the Opposition. Their performance is closely watched and judged by the media and the public for combating tricky adversaries while advocating perspectives on favored topics⁵. For these reasons, PMQ provides a convenient channel for investigating the power dynamics of control and resistance in contemporary political discourse.

In comparison with communicative exchanges in political interview genre, the verbal duel between the PM and the Opposition leader in PMQ genre displays both similarities and differences. On one hand, the Opposition leader, taking the political interviewer stance, is supposed to pose questions. However, the impartial questioning stance of the interviewer does not arise in questions proposed by the Opposition

leader; rather, they are designed to denigrate the PM and the current government (Beard, 2000:105). On the other hand, the PM, taking the politician interviewee stance, is expected to fulfill his interactive role of a responder, giving satisfactory answers to questions posed by the Opposition leader and MPs.

Further, various previous researches have demonstrated that the interviewer as the questioner owns more institutionally pre-allocated power than the interviewee in media interviews (Greatbatch, 1986; Hutchby, 1996; Penz, 1996). Similarly, in the highly institutionalized genre of PMQ, the power relations between the PM and the Opposition Leader is constrained on one hand and negotiated by their performance on the other. The difference is the Opposition leader as the questioner does not necessarily have more power in the PMQ institution.

For the PM, he/she is institutionally required to fulfill the obligation of providing answers to every question asked by MPs. The difficulty is that no prior notice of question topics is offered and responses must be given spontaneously, thinking on his or her feet⁶. Yet, the chance of being caught off guard is reduced by question anticipation by the PM's whole army of researchers (Beard, 2000:105). In addition, the PM is supported by government backbenchers' 'helpful questions'⁷ to elicit praise-worthy speeches on government political progress in his answering. Hence, the answering turn is the crucial vehicle by which the PM fulfills the ends of undermining challenges posed by the Opposition Leader's questions and further advocating the government's achievements.

Whereas, the leader of the Opposition, although institutionally constrained to bid for the Speaker's approval before asking questions, enjoys a marked privilege of questioning chances and priority. Compared with common MPs, the leader of the Opposition can ask four or five questions⁸ (supplementary questions included); on the other hand, the Speaker grants other MPs questioning chances to other MPs only when he sees no bidding from the Opposition leader. Besides these turn-taking

privileges, the Opposition leader often has the control of the flow of PMQ discourse.

Thus, both the PM and the Opposition leader have institutionally prescribed advantages and disadvantages in the staged verbal exchanges of PMQ. Their spontaneous performance largely shapes the dynamics of control and resistance in the whole.

2.4. Pre-Cameron Conservative Discourse: challenges facing the new Tory leader

The massive challenge of reforming the Conservative party to regain government is what faces David Cameron since his election success in December 2005. The British Conservative political discourse before 2005 is closely reviewed in this part to demonstrate changes of the Conservative party under Cameron's leadership. Here, the term 'Pre-Cameron Conservative' is used to refer to the Conservative party under leaders—Margaret Thatcher, John Major, William Hague, Ian Duncan Smith, and Michael Howard.

The Pre-Cameron Conservative discourse is predominantly shaped by the contemporary British political ideology of Thatcherism, which maintains values of a free-market approach to government services, reduced welfare state, direct taxation cuts, privatization of national industries and public services, nuclear family values, and gradual distancing from the EU (Willetts, 1992). These perspectives have not only revived the long-term declining British economy, but also guided the Conservative party to win three successive general elections between 1975 and 1987. However, with the pass of the party's golden age, these bold reforming strokes have produced unavoidable social problems, causing unsatisfactory public perspectives against Thatcher and the Conservative Party. Britain under Margaret Thatcher's leadership witnessed increasing unemployment, increasing conflict against ethnic minorities, and increasing of indirect taxation, with a poll tax being the most unpopular. As

commented by Fairclough (2000), the political discourse in this period has been characterized as highly polemic. A theme of ‘two-nation Thatcherism’ is demonstrated in the greater distance between the rich and poor, between Britain and Trade Union, and among common citizens. Moreover, Thatcher’s famous words—‘there’s no such a thing as a society’ has ‘cast a spell’ on her successors, leaving them busy with fixing problems of social cohesion (O’Hara, 2007:212).

After Thatcher, the Conservative political discourse keeps the creeds of Thatcherism under John Major’s administration in the nineties. It was during this period that the Conservative party experienced a most severe downfall and came to be widely perceived as economically incompetent as a result of the disastrous events of ‘Black Wednesday’ and ERM recession, morally incompetent because of party member corruption and affairs, and politically incompetent because of continually increasing indirect taxes. In particular, social policies based on traditional values of family structure offered tax incentives only to married couples, creating an impression of clear discrimination against single parents⁹ and having the direct consequence of loosing women voters and women party candidates. As a result of the government’s broken pledges of tax cuts and economic recovery, the public trust for the Conservative party hit its lowest point. In response to Major’s campaign slogan—‘Vote Conservative on Thursday and the recovery will begin on Friday’, Paddy Ashdown, the Lib-Dem leader, quipped, ‘be fair: he never said which Friday’¹⁰.

After its unprecedented parliamentary defeat in 1997, the Conservative political discourse during the leadership of William Hague, Ian Duncan Smith, and Michael Howard shifted to a theme of automatic opposition to policies proposed by the Labour government (Oakland, 2001:100). The policies of the Conservative party are mostly anti-immigration, anti-single mother, anti-homosexual, and anti-Europe. But simply sticking to traditional conservative values cannot stop the Conservative party from declining. Conservative party membership continues to fall; most Conservative voters are elderly and poorly educated men¹¹. As suggested by Gilmour (1992:337), the

Conservative party must 'choose between the nineteenth and the twentieth century, between two-nation Thatcherism and one-nation Toryism... the lunge to the right caused social retreat without economic advance'.

Thus, mere right-wing positions and policies cannot match the contemporary standard in the British political context. In her 2002 party conference speech, Theresa May, Shadow Leader of the House of Commons, pointed out that the Conservatives should support their leader in changing the negative image of a 'nasty party'; rather than indulging themselves in 'petty feuding or personal sniping'¹². Attempts to move away from right-wing extremism have been made to some extent under the leadership of William Hague, Ian Duncan Smith, and Michael Howard; yet eventually revert to traditional Tory territory (Elliot & Hanning, 2007).

With a holistic view of the existing problems, David Cameron, the new Tory leader, has made great progress in planning concrete approaches for reforming the Conservative party. These new approaches can be summarized as 'decentralization, local democracy, and social responsibility' (Fraser, 2007:89). They are oriented to promote the reforming party ideology of Compassionate Conservatism, which emphasizes the fulfillment of traditional Conservative values of order, authority, and property with a flourish of modern Compassionate Conservative perspectives on enabling society and individual (Fraser, 2007:87). The following observation by Peter Kerr vividly demonstrates the success of Cameron's new approaches in preserving Conservative inheritance and developing new thinking:

Cameron's real skill has been his ability to 'cast a spell' over different sections of the Conservative Party in such a way as to make himself appeal to modernizers and traditionalists alike, deluding each into the belief that he is the authentic voice of their interests. (Kerr, 2007:49)

In this sense, the Conservative political discourse has been largely transformed to a

theme of political consensus, taking a political centre stance representing all citizens of Britain. However, many critics argue that in reforming the party to ‘consensus politics’ (Fraser, 2007:37), Cameron also faces a dilemma of maintaining a distinctive style while absorbing Blairite political perspectives. The study on Cameron’s questioning performance in the House of Commons will focus on how Cameron establishes populist attachment to the political discourses of traditional and modern Conservative themes, with little attention paid to Cameron’s difficulty in advocating consensus politics.

Chapter 3 Data and analytic framework

3.1. Data Collection

Video files of the data were obtained from the 10 Downing Street website archives¹³, which are assured to be unedited recordings of live broadcasts. The corpus consists of 52 PMQ sessions from 7 Dec, 2005 to 27 Jun, 2007, of which the most salient feature is verbal interventions between Tony Blair, the British Prime Minister at the time, and David Cameron, the Opposition Leader. Staged verbal duels between Tony Blair and David Cameron are viewed as providing not only representative data of power dynamics between the PM and the Opposition Leader in PMQ interactions, but also crucial insights into the reforming political ideology of the Conservative party.

3.2. Analytic framework

Taking a critical discourse analysis (CDA) perspective, this study analyzes the staged verbal duel between Tony Blair and David Cameron from three main aspects: textual features, pragmatic functions, and socio-political contexts. Special attention is paid to David Cameron’s questioning performance, aiming to demonstrate his questioning

strategies and image-building mechanism in combating Tony Blair discursively. Owing to the close relationship between question and answer as an adjacency pair, the power effect of Cameron's questions is also investigated with view of answers offered by Tony Blair.

Analysis of Cameron's questioning strategies in the PMQ genre is conducted at both the macro and the micro discourse level. Sessions on controversial themes of NHS and crime are chosen to represent power dynamics between the PM and Cameron in the highly belligerent PMQ discourse. At the macro discourse level, sequential structure of the verbal duel between David Cameron and Tony Blair is firstly examined to explicate parliamentary debate routines at PMQ communicative events. More essentially, sequential organization within Cameron's questioning turns and Blair's answering turns is also investigated for an overview of combating steps of defence and attack. At the micro discourse level, Cameron's questioning utterances are analyzed for both textual features and pragmatic functions. This approach is lent support by Paul Chilton's observation that 'in the production of parliamentary discourse, form is important, but performance is crucial' (Chilton, 2004:108).

Moreover, analysis of David Cameron's image-building process is also carried out at both macro and micro discourse levels. At the macro discourse level, salient questioning themes of ideological consensus and conflict with the PM are chosen for obtaining insights into the reforming ideology of the Conservative party in modern socio-political settings. At the micro discourse level, how the new style of Compassionate Conservatism is 'performed' through Cameron's questioning utterances is under detailed analysis from aspects of textual features and pragmatic functions. Combining discourse features at the macro and the micro levels, this study maintains that contextualized by modern British party politics, Cameron's language further plays an essential role in delivering the reforming political ideology to the general public.

Chapter 4 Cameron vs. Blair: political conflict in the adversarial PMQ discourse

The analysis in this part focuses on two features of the verbal duel between David Cameron and Tony Blair—macro and micro discourse features. In order to closely track their political conflict in PMQ genre, sessions on controversial questioning themes, such as NHS and crime issues, were selected for detailed analysis. The primary aim is to examine power strategies in Cameron's questioning turns in combating Tony Blair in the highly institutionalized genre of PMQ.

4.1 Macro organization features of Cameron-Blair verbal duel

Based on the highly belligerent PMQ session concerning contentious issues of NHS (data in Appendix 14), Table 1 provides an overview of the sequential structure of fierce parliamentary debates between David Cameron (DC) and Tony Blair (PM):

Table 1 Sequential structure of parliamentary debate, 1 Nov, 2006

<p><u>1st questioning by DC:</u></p> <p><i>Preamble</i>—disgruntled health professionals lobbying in parliament concerning complaints against Labour NHS mismanagement; quotation of Labour medical officer’s comment</p> <p><i>Question</i>—asking about the PM’s acceptance of the medical officer’s criticism</p>	<p>Preparation for launching attacks</p> <p>Attack</p>
<p>Defence</p> <p>Shift to attack</p> <p>Attack</p>	<p><u>1st answering by the PM:</u></p> <p>Listing of NHS advances under the Labour government</p> <p>‘If he wants the best evidence of improvement in the NHS’</p> <p>Quotation of shadow health spokesman’s comment</p>

<p><u>2nd questioning by DC:</u></p> <p><i>Preamble</i>—pointing out the PM’s evasion in answering</p> <p>Quotation of the BMA chairman’s comment</p> <p><i>Question</i>—asking about the PM’s awareness of the fact of low morale in NHS</p>	<p>Defence/counterattack</p> <p>Preparation for launching attacks</p> <p>Attack</p>
<p>Defence</p> <p>Attack</p>	<p><u>2nd answering by the PM:</u></p> <p>More praises on NHS improvements by the Labour government</p> <p>Criticizing the Conservative party’s position regarding NHS issue</p>
<p><u>3rd questioning by DC:</u></p> <p><i>Preamble 1</i>—emphasizing the fact that the public are protesting against the Labor’s policy, rather than the Conservative’s policy; the PM’s ignorance of the public opinion</p> <p><i>Question 1</i>—asking about the PM’s acceptance of the government health guru’s opinion</p> <p><i>Preamble 2</i>—quotation of the government health guru’s comment; allusion to a specific case of government disorder</p> <p><i>Question 2</i>—asking about the PM’s awareness about the fact of government disorder</p>	<p>Defence/counterattack</p> <p>Preparation for launching attacks</p> <p>Preparation for launching attacks</p> <p>Attack</p>
<p>Defence</p> <p>Shift to attack</p>	<p><u>3rd answering by the PM:</u></p> <p>Reemphasizing NHS advances; acknowledging NHS management difficulties</p> <p>‘...but that is hardly surprising when we look at what his policy is’</p>
<p><u>4th questioning by DC:</u></p> <p><i>Pre-amble</i>—‘For once, the PM admits there are real difficulties in the NHS’</p> <p><i>Question</i>—asking about the PM’s acceptance of causes for NHS failings and criticism against the Chancellor</p>	<p>Defence/counterattack</p> <p>Attack</p>

Defence	<u>4th answering by the PM:</u> Praising the Labour government on NHS advances for the forth time
Attack	Criticism on the Conservatives' NHS policy

It can be observed in Table 1 that Cameron-Blair verbal duel has two predictable salient features. First, the sequential structure of their exchanges grants both Cameron and Blair turn-taking privileges, with Cameron leading the flow of discourse by initiating the first question and Blair concluding the whole arguing discourse by ending with the final response. The second feature is that Cameron's questioning and Blair's answering are framed differently to achieve different discursive effects. Cameron's questioning turns usually consist of preamble and question, with discursive effects of preparing to launch attacks and actually attacking respectively in political areas of public concerns and government weaknesses. Particularly in preambles after the first questioning turn, Cameron frequently employs a negative commenting/interpreting tactic against Blair's answering to achieve a defending and counterattacking effect. In contrast, Blair's turns are notable for evasion in answering, usually consisted of defending government policies and attacking Cameron on the Conservative policy-making and pre-Cameron Conservative governance failings. Thus, the typical discursive process of the Cameron-Blair verbal duel can be summarized in the following illustration:

Table 2 Discursive process of the Cameron-Blair verbal duel

Cameron	preparing for launching attacks → actual attack
Blair	defence ← shift to attack → attack
Cameron	defence/counterattack → preparing for launching attacks → actual attack
Blair	defence ← shift to attack → attack
Cameron	defence/counterattack → preparing for launching attacks → actual attack
Blair	defence ← shift to attack → attack
...	...

4.2. Question-answer pair: often-used strategies in Cameron-Blair verbal duel

Table 1 and Table 2 have displayed an adjacency pair pattern of question and answer. In this part of the analysis, specific micro discourse features in Cameron-Blair verbal duel are examined to show how spontaneous power strategies work dynamically to achieve the effects mentioned previously of defending and attacking in the highly institutionalized PMQ genre. The analytic focus is on Cameron's questioning strategies and their discursive effects reflected in Blair's evasive answering in PMQ sessions.

4.2.1. Preamble for launching attacks in Cameron's questioning and evasion in Blair's answering

The fixed routine of Cameron questioning, as illustrated in Table 1, comprises preambles and questions. As a series of statements before the actual question, preamble plays a contributing role in claiming discursive power, owing to its well-designed syntactic form that encompasses explicit propositions and entails implicit propositions. The preamble schema of parliamentary questions has been described by Wilson (1990:163) as firstly presenting some set of circumstances/facts and then establishing them as proposition or presupposition of the actual question. In Cameron's questioning preamble, this contextualization mechanism and incorporated power strategies can thus be seen as working together to prepare for launching attacks in the actual questions that follow. As observed in Cameron's preambles in 52 PMQ sessions, the political context for attacking the PM and government is based mainly on public concerns and government weaknesses. Through consistently attacking the PM and the Labour government on these two aspects, a resolute and authoritative Conservative party image is established.

In Cameron's preamble, explicit and implicit propositions constitute the crucial

vehicle through which discursive power is achieved. Explicit propositions contained in the preamble are mainly assertions directly criticizing the PM and the government. Whereas, implicit propositions entailed by the preamble are mainly presuppositions and implicatures indirectly criticizing the PM and the government. The interplay of explicit and implicit language use in Cameron's preambles creates a pragmatic effect of undermining the discursive power and the political position of the PM and the Labour government. This feature is vividly demonstrated by the following extract from Appendix 14 on the controversial theme of NHS crisis:

(1) Cameron-Blair initial exchange in the House of Commons, 1 Nov, 2006

1 DC: Today hundreds of health workers will be lobbying in Parliament worried about deficits,
 worried about cuts and worried about low morale in our health service...The
 government's chief medical officer has said evidence from within the NHS tells a
 consistent story for public health of poor morale, declining numbers, inadequate
 5 recruitment and budgets being raided to solve financial deficits. Was the chief medical
 officer speaking for the government?

PM: Let me tell him what is actually happening within the NHS. There are 400,000 fewer
 people on waiting lists than there were in 1997, waiting times for cataracts and heart
 operations are down, people now get their cancer treatment on time, and there are
 10 300,000 more staff in the NHS. If he wants the best evidence of improvement in the
 NHS, someone said this morning: 'if you were to say to me is the NHS better now
 than it was in 1997, I think there have been improvements.' Who was that? The
 shadow health spokesman.

In this first verbal exchange, Cameron's motivation to present the Conservative party positively and the Labour government negatively in preamble discourse is realized through explicit and implicit propositions and relevant subtle shifts in 'salience'. The notion of 'salience' refers to the degree of markedness concerning various linguistic choices in generating the intended meaning (Verschueren, 1999:173-200). Verschueren contends that when a presupposition or implicature clashes with an

marks in Formulation 1.

In this way, negative presentation of the Labour government by the implicit and explicit propositions in Cameron's preamble functions pragmatically to justify his questioning position, even though the question could be extremely aggressive and face-threatening. In lines 5-6, Cameron asks a trick question—'was the chief medical officer speaking for the government?' The PM would be trapped if he provides a direct positive answer, accepting accusatory propositions conveyed in Cameron's preamble. He would also be trapped even if a direct negative answer is provided, which can possibly be interpreted as ignorance of government representative's remarks and disagreement within the Labour government. Thus, strategies in Cameron's preamble and question effectively drive the PM to provide indirect answers, as demonstrated by the following table:

Table 3 Evasion in Blair's answering

Cameron's questioning	Blair's answering
<i>Preamble:</i> accusatory propositions of Labour's NHS mismanagement quotation of Labour medical officer's remarks	\emptyset (Ignoring the question)
<i>Question:</i> asking about the PM's acceptance of the medical officer's criticism	praising rhetoric for listing NHS advances (Defence) quotation of shadow health spokesman's remarks (Attack)

Dealing with accusations in Cameron's questioning, the PM's answering utterances display a salient feature of evasion. Rather than offering a direct answer, the PM completely ignores the question, opting for indirect answering pragmatically functions to defend and attack. He starts by using a rhetoric parallelism in listing concrete advances in NHS made by the Labour government (lines 7-10), oriented to discredit

accusatory propositions in Cameron's preamble, thus fulfilling a pragmatic function of defence. Answering turn is further used for attacks, which is pre-marked discursively by 'if he wants the best evidence of improvements in the NHS' (line 10). In lines 10-3, the PM quotes the shadow health spokesman's remarks, oriented to weakening the discursive power imposed by Cameron's quotation from the Labour medical officer's remarks, thus attacking David Cameron and the Conservative party. Ignoring Cameron's question and attending to accusatory propositions in Cameron's questioning, as illustrated in Table 3, constitute evasion in answering, which can also be observed in the PM's responses in other PMQ sessions.

4.2.2. Preamble for defence/counterattack in combating Blair's evasive answers

As shown in Tables 1 and 2 that from the second questioning turn, Cameron's preambles exercise another salient pragmatic function of defence/counterattack in combating attacks posed by Blair's evasive answer. In this part, the analysis is conducted on Cameron's preambles in verbal exchanges concerning controversial issues in NHS and the Social Justice System. The discursive effect of defence/counterattack at preamble beginnings is achieved mainly by three features of Cameron's language use—expressions for tracking down the PM's evasion in answering, expressions for negatively commenting on/interpreting the PM's response and expressions for denying the factuality of the PM's answers in the interests of the Conservative party.

The pragmatic functions of Cameron's preamble beginnings are firstly demonstrated by Table 4, which offers an overview of Cameron's linguistic choice for undermining the PM's answering stance in the verbal exchange on sex offence crime (Extract 2). Instead of directly addressing Cameron's interrogation on whether the government will fix its broken promise to introduce the information-sharing system, the PM deploys praising rhetoric to deliver the government advances in tackling sex offence

crime. In Cameron's following questioning preamble, he firstly reveals the PM's evasion in answering by the statement that 'the PM has completely failed to answer the question', and underlines the reality of the government weakness by the declarative sentence that 'the fact is the Home Secretary told system would in place in this year, and it is not going to be'. He then counterattacks the PM by asking a negative framed question—'is that not completely typical of the way in which this government operates', which greatly undermines the political stance of the PM and the government.

Table 4 House of Commons, 13 Jun, 2007

	Language choice	Pragmatic function
Blair's answering	'massive step forward'; 'welcomed by...'; 'sensible, worthwhile step forward'; 'share information better'; 'will improve in light of experience'.	<i>praising the government for political advances</i>
Cameron's questioning preamble	'The PM has completely failed to answer the question.'	<i>tracking down evasion in Blair's answering</i>
	'The fact is the Home Secretary told us that the system would in place in this year, and it is not going to be.'	<i>denying the factuality of Blair's answer</i>
	'Is that not completely typical of the way in which this government operates?'	<i>negatively interpreting Blair's answer</i>

(2) House of Commons, 13 Jun, 2007

DC: ... The Home Secretary said that information sharing system would be ready this year.

Will the PM tell us whether that promise will be kept?

PM: First let me remind the right hon. gentleman of what Sara Payne said about what the Home Secretary is going to announce... 'It's a massive step forward. If you have a child or look after a child you have a place you can go and have some access'... This has also been welcomed by the director of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. So it is a sensible, worthwhile step forward. As for the measures that were

recommended by the Bichard inquiry, it is precisely for that reason that we have systems that share information far better. What we are trying to do all the time, however, is to improve this in the light of experience ...

DC: The PM has completely failed to answer the question. The fact is that the Home Secretary told us that the system would be in place this year, and it is not going to be. Is that not completely typical of the way in which this government operates.

Tracking down the PM's evasive action in answering. The primary means of undermining challenges posed by the PM's answering is to reveal the PM's reluctance to fulfill the answerer's obligation of providing satisfactory answers. This motivation is reflected by both overt and covert expressions in Cameron's preamble discourse for tracking down the PM's evasive action.

Overt expressions for tracking evasive answers mainly take the form of negative assertions, such as 'the PM never answers the question', 'the PM has simply not answered the question', 'the PM has completely failed to answer the question', and 'that is absolutely not the explanation'. In the following extract, the PM completely ignores Cameron's question on the Home Secretary's contentious remarks and shifts the answering turn to highlight the improvements made in the system for deporting foreign prisoners, which is later captured by expressions used in Cameron's preamble beginning—'but the PM simply has not answered the question about what the Home Secretary said last night':

(3) House of Commons, 26 Apr, 2006

DC: ...after Ministers were told about the problem in July, 288 prisoners were released without being considered for deportation. Why did the Home Secretary describe that last night as 'very, very few people'?

PM: ...Some of those people have already been deported. All those cases will be considered, and since 1 April the system has been working properly, so that for the

first time ever, everyone who is identified pre-release has his or her case considered.

DC: But the PM simply has not answered the question about what the Home Secretary said last night...

Overt praising the Labour government on the political progress and deliberate ignorance of Cameron's question on the incompetence of Home Secretary are the salient characteristics of the PM's answering in the initial exchange on Foreign Prisoner Scandal. This evasive action in the PM's response is also revealed by covert expressions at the beginning of Cameron's preamble, which take a great variety of syntactic forms and fulfill the pragmatic function of reinforcing his own questioning position and undermining the PM's answering position. Specific locutions, such as 'the PM tried to fudge the issue of...', 'I do not know why the PM is attacking our health policy' and 'It was a pretty straight sort of question, and the PM has told us that he is a pretty straight sort of guy', all fall into this category. In the following exchange, the PM's answering turn is clearly used to attack Cameron's Conservative party policy, which is later tracked covertly by expression used in Cameron's preamble beginning—'I think the PM should concentrate on his own Ministers':

(4) House of Commons, 21 Jun, 2006

DC: ...Will the PM confirm that, at the very least, no forced amalgamations will take place until after that review is complete?

PM: ...Incidentally, while we are talking about how we can work together on law and order, I hope that the right hon. gentleman will now withdraw what he said last week in the House, which was that the person in the Sweeney case would be released earlier as a result of the Criminal Justice Act 2003. That is completely wrong. As a result of that Act, he can be given an indeterminate sentence, which is why he will now not be automatically paroled.

DC: I think the PM should concentrate on his own Ministers, who have been giving a completely conflicting version of events...

Negatively commenting on/interpreting the PM's response. In the discourse of Cameron's preamble, the defence/counterattack effect is further achieved through language for negatively commenting on/interpreting the vagueness and indirectness of the PM's answers for benefits of the Labour government. This feature is firstly reflected by the often-used expression 'let us be clear ...' in Cameron's preamble, followed by negative interpretation of the PM's response, as explicated by the following instances:

(5) House of Commons, 24 Jan, 2007

Let us be absolutely clear that the PM's answer gives no guarantee, so another early release scheme might well be on its way, with dangerous criminals being released onto our streets...

(6) House of Commons, 10 Jan, 2007

Let us be clear about what the PM has just said: the names of those people have been sitting in box files and he is admitting today that not all their details have been put on the police national computer...

(7) House of Commons, 26 Apr, 2006

Let us be absolutely clear about what we have just heard. The PM backs incompetent Ministers, even when he does not know the facts. That is what we have discovered...

Moreover, counterattacking the PM's evasive answers is expressed by negative comments on the PM's answering performance, such as 'people listening to that answer will, frankly, think it pathetic', 'I can sum up the PM's performance in one word—rattled', and 'I have to say to the PM that he knows exactly what his government were doing, and he knows exactly how disgraceful it can be'. Further, it is the usual case that Cameron's preamble beginning carries both negative comments and negative interpretation, thus creating substantial defending/counterattacking effect discursively; undermining the PM's answering position, which can be observed in the

following extracts:

(8) House of Commons, 8 Mar, 2006

Negative comments—In public, the PM gives us these lists of success; in private, he knows that things are going wrong and he is sacking the chief executive.

Negative interpretation—Is this not just the latest example of mismanagement in the NHS? ...

(9) House of Commons, 17 May, 2007

Negative comments—We have gone from ‘all prisoners’ to ‘all significant prisoners’, and now we have got the ‘vast bulk’. The PM is making it up as he goes along.

Negative interpretation—That is an example of a government in complete paralysis...

Denying the factuality of the PM’s answers in the interests of the Conservative party. Expressions at Cameron’s preamble beginning are also framed to undermine the factuality of the PM’s evasive answers which criticize the Conservative party policy and pre-Cameron Conservative government performance. They are often delivered by declarative sentences, such as ‘the fact is that...’ and ‘I think the PM lives on another planet’, which are made into present tense emphasizing commitment to truth.

This feature is vividly demonstrated in the following question-answer pair on the NHS crisis, extracted from Appendix 14. In his answering turn, the PM does not attend to Cameron’s question seeking confirmation of low morale in the NHS. Rather, he uses the answering turn to attack Cameron on the policies and opposition stance of the Conservative party. This ‘face threatening act’ (Brown & Levinson, 1978) is then largely undermined through language use at the preamble beginning of Cameron’s questioning, underlining the reality of public protest against Labour NHS cuts; thus effectively defending the interests of the Conservative party and counterattacking challenges imposed by the PM’s response:

(10) House of Commons, 1 Nov, 2006

DC: ...Did the PM ever think that after nine years of Labour government, morale would be so low in the NHS?

PM: ... The Conservative party, having first opposed all the investment in the NHS, now apparently also opposes reform. The only way in which the NHS will improve is if we keep the money coming in, not cut it back, which is his policy, and make sure the reforms to get value for money.

DC: The health service professionals are not here protesting about our policies; they are protesting about his cuts...

In general, through the above analysis on pragmatic functions of Cameron's questioning preamble and Blair's evasive answer, it is found that their language use operates according to the interests of their particular political party. This motivation is reflected by their differences in the framing of questioning and answering. It is found through observing data on contentious themes of NHS and crime that Cameron usually frames questioning according to public concerns and government weaknesses, to achieve the ends of attacking the government or government officers for incompetence. By contrast, Blair often frames his response either to praise the government for political progress or to attack Cameron on the Conservative policy-making and pre-Cameron Conservative government performance. The contextualizing process of Cameron's questioning operates by language choices in the preamble intended to reveal evasion in the PM's response, to discredit the PM's answers and to negatively interpret the PM's performance. The contextualizing process of Blair's answer, on the other hand, is displayed in language choice for reframing Cameron's question to make a political point.


4.2.3. Questions for attacking

In Cameron's questioning turns, linguistic performance in the preamble discourse is

found to be a preparation for launching attacks in actual questions that follow. This mechanism is described by Wilson (1990:165) as an ‘inductive syllogism’, where the preamble is the ‘input’, contextualizing and presupposing propositions in the question; the question is the ‘output’, concluding and promoting propositions in the preamble. Thus, combining the effect of defence and attack preparation in the preamble and actual attack in the question, the discursive power demonstrated by Cameron’s questioning severely demeans the position of the PM and the Labour government.

How Cameron asks questions to achieve his intended attacking effect is shown in the following table. The analysis groups Cameron’s questions into three types—critical, challenging and antagonistic, in conjunction with their places on scale of attacking power from low to high:

Table 5 Analysis on the pragmatic function of Cameron’s questions

Scale of attack	Pragmatic function of Cameron’s questions
<p>Low</p>  <p>High</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Critical: neutrally established questions seeking information which the PM may not want to publicize, often directed to press for cross-party actions. 2. Challenging: negatively established questions seeking the PM’s confirmation or explanation for existing criticisms or negative evaluations on the Labour government performance, often directed to weaken the government’s political position. 3. Antagonistic: negatively established questions directly accusing the PM and government officials of wrongdoings, often directed to attack position of the PM and Labour backbenchers.

Compared with government backbenchers’ questions described by Wilson (1990:167) as ‘positively established’ questions of praise and positive responsibility, Cameron’s questions are often ‘negatively established’ as questions of blame and negative

responsibility for challenging the PM and government. Specifically, two discoursal elements help to shape this negative established feature of Cameron's questioning—the opening gambit and attached propositions.

The following detailed count of opening gambits in 52 PMQ sessions indicates that out of a total of 310 questions put by Cameron, 208 fall in the category of yes/no type; 102 in the wh- type:

Table 6

Sentence type	Details of opening gambit
Yes/no question	Will/Would (89) Do/Does/Did (51) Is/Are/Was (32) Can (31) Has (4) Should (1)
Wh- question	Why (45) What (21) Why not (14) Who (8) How (8) When (4) Which (2)

Cameron's salient use of yes/no questions can be understood by the nature of sentence structure. The advantage of using yes/no questions is that they take a 'closed' form, asking for more constrained responses than wh- questions do (Wilson, 1990:146). This means that yes/no questions are more likely to drive the PM into an answering dilemma: failing to provide legitimate positive/negative responses causes evasion; while failing to undermine accusatory propositions in the question constitutes embarrassment. Therefore, the deployment of yes/no questions functions pragmatically to pose discursive attacks. What is of interest to note is that of the 102 wh- questions, questions with 'why' gambit are used as frequently as 45 times. This is also because 'why question' has a comparative advantage for constraining the PM's response. Of the 45 'why' questions, the negative form of 'why question' is found to be used 14 times, which is a stronger form for eliciting agreement answer in the PM responses, as demonstrated by the following instances:

(11) House of Commons, 14 Jun, 2006

The PM likes to tell us that he believes in freedom of information. So I ask him again: publishing the letter would not harm national security or confidentiality, so publish the letter, why not?

(12) House of Commons, 8 Feb, 2006

One minute we have big concessions to win over Back Benchers; the next minute we have no changes at all. Instead of flip-flopping, why cannot the PM get out and sell the reforms?

On the other aspect, propositions in actual questions are of crucial significance in the sense that they function to complete the propositions in the preamble, inviting further inferences, which greatly reflects the questioning aim of David Cameron. Wh-questions with opening gambits, such as ‘what’, ‘who’, ‘how’, ‘when’, and ‘which’, are comparatively open in form and often used to construct comparatively neutral questions seeking information that the PM may not want to publicize or pressing for cross-party political actions. Otherwise, they are frequently observed as negatively established with accusatory propositions in order to achieve an attacking effect, which is explicated in the following detailed analysis.

In accordance with the categorization of pragmatic functions in Table 5, critical questions which pragmatically function to seek exclusive information or press for cross-party actions can be neutrally constructed with yes/no questions and wh-questions, which are reflected in the following instance:

(13) House of Commons, 18 Apr, 2007

Today, we can help those people, and I ask the PM in a genuinely cross-party way. We have tabled amendments to the Pensions Bill, and they are signed by MPs from across the House, including his own former Pensions Minister. Will the PM look urgently and positively at those constructive proposals?

(14) House of Commons, 11 Jan, 2006

The decision by Iran yesterday to break the seals of its nuclear facility has caused widespread concern. What steps does the PM propose to take to maximize the international consensus on taking the issue to the United Nations Security Council?

Challenging questions for weakening the political position of the government are usually constructed negatively in forms of yes/no questions and wh- questions with propositions of direct criticism or negative evaluation, which is demonstrated in the following:

(15) House of Commons, 13 Jun, 2007

For months, the government have been briefing the tabloid newspapers that they would introduce Sarah's law. The headlines reported 'stunning victory' and that Sarah's law would 'start in months'. This afternoon, the Home Secretary will announce that Sarah's law will not be introduced. Is the PM at all surprised that the press is cynical about his government?

(16) House of Commons, 25 Oct, 2006

Three years ago, the government said that the youth justice system had been totally transformed. Yesterday, the chief inspector of prisons said that the system was approaching breaking point. Who is right?

Antagonistic questions are questions negatively established to mainly accuse the PM and government officials of wrongdoings, which most severely attack the position of the PM and Labour backbenchers. They are usually made in yes/no question form and wh- question form with explicit accusatory and face-threatening propositions, as demonstrated in the following instances:

(17) House of Commons, 24 May, 2006

While all the other Ministers are being moved, there is one Minister who has held the

same job for nine years and who said that law and order was his priority. When will the PM take personal responsibility for the shambles?

(18) House of Commons, 11 Oct, 2007

We have a PM who does not trust his Chancellor, a Chancellor who has been accused of blackmail, the latest Home Secretary wants the PM's job, the Deputy PM does not have a job but is still being paid, and all the while hospital wards are closing and the prison system is in chaos. How many more months of this paralysis have we got to put up with?

Of all Cameron's question forms, it is important to note that two stronger forms of yes/no questions used to pose substantial attacks. One has the expression 'yes or no' at the end, which performs the pragmatic function of restraining the PM's evasion in answering and achieving Cameron's questioning aim, with examples as follows:

(19) House of Common, 11 Oct, 2006

I asked the PM a pretty simple question: is the Deputy Prime Minister going to be running the country in August when the PM is away? Yes or no?

(20) House of Common, 11 Oct, 2006

It was a pretty straight sort of question, and the PM has told us that he is a pretty straight sort of a guy. Does he back the Chancellor as his successor? Yes or no? I do, does he?

To sum up, Cameron's questioning performance, which is based on the political context of public concerns and government weakness, skillfully combines the pragmatic function of the preamble and actual question for defence and attack. Both the preamble and question are negatively framed with propositions of direct criticism and accusation on the PM and the government. His questioning not only tracks down evasion in the PM's answers, but further discredits the PM's attacks on policy-making and pre-Cameron government performance, thus projecting a courageous and resolute Conservative leader image representative of the general public.

Chapter 5 Cameron's questioning: ideological consensus and conflict designed to present 'Compassionate Conservatism' in the PMQ discourse

As reviewed in Chapter 2, pre-Cameron Conservative discourse is known for a consistent theme of sticking to a solid traditional right-wing political stance that appears to automatically oppose against every bit of legislation introduced by the Labour government. The 'anti-immigration, anti-single parents, anti-homosexual and anti-Europe' feature of pre-Cameron Conservative government policy-making cannot win electoral support for the Conservatives; rather it leads to electoral defeats. The populist support of pre-Cameron Conservative government declined, due to high unemployment, increase in indirect taxation and damage by the Black Wednesday disaster. The pre-Cameron Conservatives are therefore generally perceived by the British public as a political party with a 'nasty' image of incompetence in economics, morality, and governance.

The modern Conservatives under the new leadership of David Cameron aim to reform the party by promoting the Compassionate Conservatism ideology, which advocates social inclusive policies by trusting people and sharing responsibility (Fraser, 2007:89). It is important to note that rather than completely abandoning pre-Cameron Conservative discourse themes, the reforming party ideology of Compassionate Conservatism tries to maintain pre-Cameron Conservative inheritance on one hand; while incorporating modern fresh thinking in line with the socio-political context of modern British society on the other.

This motivation for reforming the Conservative party has been consistently reflected in Cameron's questioning performance in staged verbal exchanges with the PM. The following analysis focuses on how David Cameron adjusts his language to construct ideological consensus and conflict with the PM and Labour government in his questioning discourse, and further effectively presents a 'modern and compassionate'¹⁵ Conservative party image to the media and public. A clear

questioning stance of representing the public is taken throughout PMQ sessions not only to weaken the discursive power of the PM, but also to claim solidarity with the electorate.

5.1. Theme highlighting for ideological consensus and conflict in Cameron's questioning discourse

Table 7 Questioning theme distribution of ideological consensus and conflict

<i>Themes of ideological consensus</i>	<i>Themes of ideological conflict</i>
National security 8	Government disorder 17
Ethnic minority 3	Social justice system (crime/police/law) 16
Women 3	Education 10
International spread of democracy 2	Tax/pension system 7
Trade Union 1	Environment 7
EU 1	NHS 6
	Immigration 3

Cameron's motivation for reforming the party is first and foremost reflected at the macro level of theme highlighting, which means frequently proposing particular questioning themes in order to reinforce the public's impression of the political ideology of the Conservative party. In the corpus of 52 PMQ sessions, Cameron's questioning themes fall into two main categories: themes of ideological consensus and themes of ideological conflict with the PM and the Labour government.

In verbal exchanges with the PM, questioning themes designed to construct an ideological consensus mainly include national security, ethnic minority, women, international spread of democracy, Trade Unions and EU. The questioning theme of national security, especially concerning political interventions with Iraq and Iran, is

proposed as many as eight times. However, it does not strongly reflect the reforming political ideology, rather merely expressing the Opposition Leader's patriotic concerns. Themes of ethnic minorities, women and international spread of democracy are highlighted to consolidate the public's perception that the Conservative party will change the candidate under-representation of women and ethnic minorities and encourage international spread of liberalism and democracy.

Questioning themes designed to demonstrate ideological conflict include mainly Labour government disorder, social justice system, education, tax/pension system, environment, NHS and immigration. Among all these themes, issues of social justice system and education, are highlighted for projecting a reformed party ideology, preserving Tory traditions and adding new values of modern liberalism. The frequently mentioned questioning theme of accusing the government of disorder and incompetent officials cannot reflect the reforming Conservative party ideological trend, since this is an area where the Opposition Leader is always expected to have a disagreement.

5.2. Ideological consensus with the PM and the Labour government in Cameron's questioning discourse

The analysis in this part examines Cameron's questioning performance on two highlighted themes of ethnic minorities and women. Linguistic expressions in these two areas, on one hand, concretely construct an ideological consensus with the PM and Labour party, changing the automatic opposing habit of the pre-Cameron political position. On the other, more essentially, Cameron's questioning discourse reflects a coherent and consistent ideological motivation for approaching party reformation by flourishing traditional values of one-nation Conservatism, introduced by Benjamin Disraeli in the 1860s and 1870s and aiming for national success with full support from all sectors of society; incorporating new political perspectives of modern liberalism,

which encourages full respect of individuals and equality in society (Fraser, 2007:87-8).

Examination of Cameron's questioning discourse suggests that ideological consensus with Labour is performed mainly by representing the Conservative party to show overt agreement in preambles to the PM and pressing for cross-party political actions in actual questions. This discursive feature is consistently demonstrated in Cameron's questioning performance on issues of women and ethnic minorities in the following extracts from data presented in full in Appendix 16:

(21)

As the PM has just said, the demonstrations in London over the weekend caused widespread concern. Muslims, as he has also just said, contribute an enormous amount to this country and, for the overwhelming majority, Islam is a religion of peace. Does he agree that, in all of this, there is a danger that their voice will be drowned out? (*House of Commons, 8th Feb, 2006*)

The PM was right to emphasize the role that the Muslim community itself should play in helping to root out extremism, but we all have a role to play in helping to foster a greater sense of common citizenship. Does the PM agree that we need an ambitious nationwide programme, including youth volunteering and school exchanges, as part of that? Does he further agree that such a programme would work best with the participation of all parties right from the start? And will he make sure that that happens in all cases in future? (*House of Commons, 5th Jul, 2006*)

(22)

The 200th anniversary of the ending of slave trade in the British Empire is the right time to acknowledge the pain and devastation that was caused by that evil trade...I am delighted that the PM will be signing the EU convention, as we suggested earlier this year. Does the PM agree that one of the most useful things that we can do to end this sickening trade is to

ensure that when women flee their captors, there is a safe place for them to go? Will he join me in praising the work of voluntary sector organizations, such as Sister Ann Teresa's, that provide safe places up and down the country? ... Will he make sure that the government do all that they can to support those excellent voluntary bodies? (*House of Commons, 21st Mar, 2007*)

It is instructive to first look at the macro organization of Cameron's questioning through which consensus in political thought and actions are achieved. Cameron's questioning discourse on ethnic minorities and women themes is firstly analyzed for the order of presentation of preamble and question, as shown in Formulation 2:

Formulation 2

Preamble: agree with the PM on the public concern of Muslims' demonstration in London.

Acknowledge Muslims' contribution to Britain.

Acknowledge Islam is a religion of peace.

Question: ask the PM's awareness of the danger of distancing Muslims.

Preamble: agree with the PM in emphasizing the role of Muslim community in rooting out extremism.

Propose common responsibility of fostering a greater sense of common citizenship.

Question: ask the PM's agreement with the nationwide programme for fostering common citizenship.

Ask the PM's agreement with cross-party political action for the programme.

Ask the PM's further guarantee of cross-party political action in all political areas.

Preamble: agree with the PM in signing the EU convention.

Question: ask the PM's agreement with the importance of voluntary section in ending women's slave trade.

Ask the PM's acknowledgement of the contribution of voluntary organizations.

Ask the PM's guarantee in supporting excellent voluntary bodies.

On issues of women and ethnic minorities, the macro organization of Cameron's questioning displays a salient feature of seeking political consensus and posing minor attacks. It can be observed in Formulation 2 that propositions embedded in preambles are often statements to express concerns about significant current events as a Compassionate Conservative leader. In Extract (21) concerning the ethnic minority theme, linguistic expression for showing concerns in the preamble is phrased as 'the demonstration in London over the weekend caused widespread concern.' Further, significant current events are stated in Cameron's questioning preamble to draw public attention. In Extract (22) concerning women's issues, the call for general concern from both parties and the public is textually manifested by the expression that 'the 200th anniversary of the ending of slave trade in the British Empire is the right time to acknowledge the pain and devastation that was caused by that evil trade'.

Most questions on these two themes are 'neutrally established' (Wilson, 1990:167), with no accusatory propositions of blaming the Labour government for any state of affairs. The main pragmatic functions of these questions are for information-seeking and confirmation-seeking, intended to press the PM for cross-party actions as a Compassionate Conservative leader supporting women and ethnic minorities. It is of interest to note that questions pressing for cross-party actions often begin with the 'will' gambit, which demonstrates overt politeness. As suggested by Wilson (1990:152), 'will' opening gambit is a useful discourse marker for making rejection more difficult for the respondent. Since questions with 'will' gambit are more polite and indirect than questions with 'can' gambit, any refusal would constitute essentially a 'face threatening act' (Brown & Levinson, 1978). Neutrally established questions, such as 'will he join me in praising the work of voluntary sector organizations', 'will he make sure that the government do all that they can to support those excellent voluntary bodies' and 'will he make that happens in all cases in future' are cases in point. Furthermore, as demonstrated in Formulation 2, questions in this regard often follow a meaning order of asking the PM's awareness of significance of a political event, acceptance of cross-party political action, and further guarantee of full support

for cross-party action in all other political areas.

Ideological consensus in the PMQ discourse is further delivered by Cameron's linguistic choice of overt expressions of agreement and positive comments on the PM's response. As in specific data of Appendix 16, Cameron's preambles often begin with agreement expression, such as 'the PM is absolutely right (to emphasize)', 'as the PM has just said', 'on the specific point the PM just mentioned', and 'we all agree with the PM'. Consensus in preamble discourse is also constructed by Cameron's expression of appreciation at the PM's answers, for instance, 'I am delighted that the PM will be signing the EU convention, as we suggested earlier this year', 'I welcome what the PM has said', or simply 'I am grateful for that answer'. Furthermore, in his actual questions, seeking the PM's approval for cross-party actions are presented as 'does he agree that we need an ambitious nationwide programme'; 'does he further agree that such a programme would work best with the participation of all parties'; 'will he join me in praising the work of voluntary section organizations' and 'will he make sure that the government do all that they can to support those excellent voluntary bodies'. In addition, the inclusive use of the pronoun 'we', as demonstrated in Extracts (21) and (22), is consistently employed by Cameron to include to both the Conservative and Labour members. These linguistic choices reflect Cameron's political end of asking for full support from both parties in developing programs and organizations for the benefit of women and ethnic minorities.

On issues of women and ethnic minorities, linguistic expressions in Cameron's questioning discourse therefore pragmatically function to construct substantial ideological consensus with the PM and the Labour government; further projecting a Compassionate Conservative leader image showing great concern for all citizens of Britain. Cameron in his questioning discourse first underlines the significant issues of Muslim demonstrations and women's slave trade, so as to draw support from both sides of the House and the British public. He then makes statesmanlike proposals for cross-party political actions for solving difficulties in these two political areas. On the

topic of ethnic minorities, Cameron presses for a nationwide programme, encouraging children from different ethnic and religious backgrounds to involve themselves fully in youth volunteering and school exchanges. In combating women's slave trade, Cameron's questioning discourse suggests that he fully recognizes the important role played by the voluntary sector, a progressive move incorporating political perspectives which have been taken to be New Labour discourse supporting 'volunteering, charity and civic responsibility' (Fraser, 2007:89). In addition, positively presenting the Muslim community and voluntary organizations by praising expressions, such as, 'fostering common citizenship', 'contribute enormous amount to this country', 'Islam is a religion of peace', 'excellent voluntary bodies' in Extracts (21) and (22), not only demonstrates ideological consensus, but also claims solidarity with the British general public, especially with ethnic minorities and women.

To sum up, by showing consensus with the PM and the Labour government in supporting programs and voluntary organizations working for benefits of women and ethnic minorities, Cameron's questioning discourse effectively accentuates the reforming party ideology of preserving one-nation Conservatism discourse for obfuscating division and difference and incorporating modern liberalism discourse for encouraging equal development for all citizens of Britain, especially women and ethnic minorities. These reforming ideological changes are aimed at changing a party image that represents only traditional white, middle-class and middle-aged male candidates (Fraser, 2007:89), constituting a clear turn-away from pre-Cameron Conservative discourse themes of opposing single parents and ethnic minorities.

5.3. Ideological conflict with the PM and the Labour government in Cameron's questioning discourse

This part investigates Cameron's questioning performance on issues of crime and education, the two most frequently mentioned themes for demonstrating ideological

conflict with the political stance of the New Labour government. Through strong disagreement on these two aspects, Cameron delivers a new political perspective of limiting the role of government and empowering individuals and society to the public and media (Fraser, 2007). Cameron's use of language for questioning also vividly reflects the salient feature of the reforming party ideology as a coherent mixture of one-nation Conservatism discourse and modern liberalism discourse.

Ideological conflict with the PM and New Labour party is delivered mainly by Cameron as the leader of the Conservatives consistently attacking the government on its incompetence and broken promises in both preambles and questions. This discursive feature is vividly demonstrated in the following two PMQ questioning extracts concerning the theme of fighting sex offence crime (with data presented in full in Appendix 17):

(23)

For months, the government have been briefing the tabloid newspapers that they would introduce Sarah's law. The headlines reported 'stunning victory' and that Sarah's law would 'start in months'. This afternoon, the Home Secretary will announce that Sarah's law will not be introduced. Is the PM at all surprised that the press is cynical about his government?

I have to say to the PM that he knows exactly what his government was doing, and he knows exactly how disgraceful it can be ... The headlines of the tabloids today are screaming out about 'chemical castration for pedophiles', but if we listen to what the Home Secretary said on the radio, it is about giving a few of them Prozac pills. Let us look at something that would really make a difference in terms of stopping sex offenders preying on children. After the dreadful Soham murders, there was the Bichard report, which recommended a system for the police to share information so that we could stop more sex offenders more quickly. The Home Secretary said that that information sharing system would be ready this year. Will the PM tell us whether that promise will be kept?

The PM has completely failed to answer the question. The fact is that the Home Secretary told us that the system would be in place this year, and it is not going to be. Is that not completely typical of the way in which this government operates? Initiatives that are never going to happen are endlessly spun to the media, but when it comes to serious measures that would really help to protect our children from sex offenders, this government are completely incompetent at introducing them. Will the PM confirm today that the full system of information sharing recommended by Bichard report will not be introduced for another three years, until at least 2010—yes or no? (*House of Commons, 13 Jun, 2007*)

Cameron's questions on sex offence crime issues have a particular macro organization, where ideological conflict in political stance is primarily delivered. This arrangement of propositions in preamble and question can be represented in the following formulation:

Formulation 3

Preamble: state that the government promised to introduce Sarah's law several months ago.

State that the media press reported it as 'stunning victory'.

State the Home Secretary's announce of not introducing Sarah's law.

Question: ask the PM's awareness that the press is cynical about the government.

Preamble: Interpret the PM's answer as acceptance of the disgraceful government operation.

Restate the Home Secretary's failure to introduce Sarah's law.

State another conflicting policy Bichard report for stopping sex offence crime.

Question: ask the PM's guarantee to implement Bichard report.

Preamble: Comment the PM's response as an evasive answer.

Restate the controversy in government policy implementation.

Question to infer the typical way of Labour government operation.

Emphasize the government incompetence in protecting the public from crime.

Question: ask the PM's confirmation whether the Bichard report would be introduced.

Comparing the macro organization in Formulation 2 and 3 reveals that Cameron's questioning discourse for ideological conflict is greatly different from questioning discourse for ideological consensus. Preambles are relatively long in length, carrying a great number of accusatory propositions for justifying the aggressive questioning stance and strong attacks in the questions that follow. Secondly, preambles for showing ideological conflict on issues of sex offence crime are often framed by the socio-political context that the Labour government made the promise to implement measures to alert the public of dangerous sex offenders in the Bichard report and Sarah's law within months but failed to do anything of that sort. Inspired by Megan's law in the United States, Sarah's law mandates information sharing of convicted child sex offenders with the public and is widely regarded as an advanced measure for fighting crime and a transparent practice by the government and police forces¹⁸. Thus, propositions embedded in the preamble are clearly directed at revealing the government's broken promises to the public and discrediting the political stance of the New Labour government.

Questions constructed for demonstrating ideological conflict are also different from those on themes of ideological consensus. Cameron's questioning utterances for showing conflict are observed to carry fewer questions, usually one or two questions. Meanwhile, most of the questions take the closed sentence structure of yes/no type question with accusatory propositions attached. Both features function pragmatically to constrain the PM's responses to answer Cameron's negatively established questions. Cameron's questions in this regard are observed to be asked with a clear stance of representing the public to seek confirmation and explanation from the PM for the government's broken promises.

Moreover, ideological conflict with the PM and Labour government is explicitly

delivered by negative interpretation/comments on the PM's answers. In Cameron's questioning discourse illustrated in Extract (23), strong disagreement with the PM's response at the preamble beginning is expressed as 'he knows exactly what his government was doing, and he knows exactly how disgraceful it can be'; 'the PM has completely failed to answer the question. The fact is that the Home Secretary told us that the system would be in place this year, and it is not going to be. Is that not completely typical of the way in which this government operates'. This not only discredits the PM's answering position, but underlines the fact of Labour government's broken promise to implement serious measures for protecting the public. A clear stance as the defender of the interests of the public can be detected in Cameron's negative interpretation of the PM's response, with inclusive use of the pronoun 'us' referring to the general public and Conservative party, rather the government. This feature of representing the public to interpret the PM's answer is clearly demonstrated in Extract 24:

(24)

Let us be clear about what the PM has just said: the names of those people have been sitting in box files and he is admitting today that not all their details have been put on the police national computer. The PM has confirmed that yet again the government have failed in their central duty to protect the public... (*House of Commons, 10 Jan, 2007*)

Ideological conflict in Cameron's questioning discourse is further overtly expressed by negatively presenting the Labour government in both preambles and questions. In Extract (23), Cameron compares the Home Secretary way of handling the issue of sex offence crime with giving pedophiles 'Prozac pills', employing a metaphor of common language in criticizing the government official. Moreover, question forms for imposing substantial attack, as analyzed in Chapter 4, are frequently used to construct ideological conflict on issues of fighting crime, demonstrated as follows:

(25)

Will the PM confirm today that the full system of information sharing recommended by Bichard report will not be introduced for another three years, until at least 2010—yes or no? (*House of Common, 13 Jun, 2007*)

Is not it the case that if one of those dangerous criminals is found to have been working with vulnerable adults or with children, the Home Secretary will not be able to run away from responsibility for it? (*House of Common, 10 Jan, 2007*)

Therefore, Cameron's questioning discourse on issues of fighting sex offence crime is characterized by proposing substantial attacking to the PM, thus demonstrating overt ideological conflict with the PM and the government. Further, the consistent negative presentation of the Labour party exerts an effect of not only distancing the Labour government from the public, but also drawing positive characteristics to the Conservative party. Linguistic expression in Cameron's questioning discourse effectively portrays the authoritative style of the Conservative party, which is eager to fulfill responsibility for resolutely protecting the public from dangerous crimes. Thus, the inheritance of one-nation Conservatism discourse is preserved for traditional values of order and authority. Furthermore, Cameron's firm support for new measures in Sarah's law and the Bichard report effectively projects a democratic and liberal style of the Conservative party, willing to share intelligence and responsibility with the public in fighting crime together. In this way, the theme of modern liberalism discourse is maintained for fully respecting the potential ability of individuals and society, thus projecting a transparent government of trusting people.

Moreover, education is another area where Cameron maintains clear ideological conflict with the PM and the Labour government, as shown in the following extract of Cameron's questions:

(26)

With our support, the PM knows that there is no danger of losing these education reforms in a parliamentary vote. So he can afford to be as bold as he wants to be. That is when he is at his best—or so I am told. Can we agree that that means trust schools owning their own buildings and land, employing their own staff, setting pay locally, developing their own culture and ethos and controlling their own admissions?

I want schools to control their own admissions. That is what is in the White Paper, and let us see that it turns into the Bill...This approach is stuck in the past, and I want to talk about the future. He was the future once. Education is one of the public services in desperate need of reform, so does he agree with me that our aim should be to ensure that all schools have these freedoms? Will he ensure that this is one reform where he will not look back and wish that he had gone further? (*House of Common, 7 Dec, 2005*)

In conflict with the PM on issues of education reform, negative presentation of the PM and Labour government is also a salient feature in Cameron's questioning discourse. Expressions in preambles such as 'he can afford to be as bold as he wants to be, when he is at his best', 'this approach is stuck in the past' and 'he was the future once' are cases in point. By describing Labour's approaches on education as 'bold' and 'stuck in the past', Cameron concludes that education is another area where Labour broke its promise and 'one of the public services in desperate need of reform'. Cameron goes on to urge the PM for education reform, asking 'will he ensure that this is one reform where he will not look back and wish that he had gone further'. An everyday life discourse of simple language is consistently used here to represent interests of the general public.

On the other hand, Cameron's questioning discourse on issues of education reform also effectively delivers the reforming party ideology of Compassionate Conservatism. Cameron first declares modern Conservative political views on greater support for education reform, by expressions of 'I want schools to control their own admissions'

and ‘I want to talk about the future’ in the preamble. Then he presses the PM on approval for education reforming proposals of the Conservative party, asking ‘can we agree that trust schools owning their own buildings and land, employing their own staff, setting pay locally, developing their own culture and ethos and controlling their own admissions’ and ‘does he agree with me that our aim should be to ensure that all schools have these freedoms’. Thus, through the verbal duel with the PM on theme of education reform, Cameron resolutely declares the modern Conservative party’s full support for education sectors, allowing them control in various areas including admission, staff, payment and cultural development.

In this way, a new positive Conservative party image is projected for limiting government intervention and trusting public service sectors. Offering more independence to public services, such as education and health sectors, is radically advocated by the Conservative party under Cameron’s leadership. This is actually motivated by the reforming ideological importance of ‘fraternity and localism’, which encourages full development in intermediate associations existing between the government and the individual (Fraser, 2007:89). Thus, the theme of modern liberalism discourse for freedom, tolerance and self-realization is successfully accentuated in Cameron’s questioning discourse on education reformation.

Chapter 6 Discussion

The first part of the analysis has demonstrated the political conflict between David Cameron and Tony Blair in the highly belligerent genre of PMQ. British parliamentary debate routine in PMQ is briefly demonstrated through the macro organizational analysis on Cameron-Blair staged verbal duel. In the institutional genre of PMQ, David Cameron, leader of the Opposition, has a relatively active role of initiating questions; Tony Blair, the Prime Minister at the time, has a relatively passive role of providing answers accordingly. However, in the adversarial PMQ

genre, power distribution between Cameron and Blair is constantly under negotiation owing to different discursive strategies served for defence and attack. Detailed analysis shows that Cameron's questioning is politically contextualized on public concerns and government weaknesses, and promoted for undermining the political stance of the PM and the Labour government. This mechanism is operated on both textual features and pragmatic functions of the preamble and actual question in Cameron's questioning utterances. Contrastively, the PM's answering is politically contextualized by criticism on Conservative policy-making and pre-Cameron Conservative governance performance, and promoted for discrediting Cameron's questioning stance and further scoring a political point.

Thus, this study argues that pragmatic function of question-answer adjacency pair in PMQ genre is not confined to their original function of requesting and offering information. Rather, they are used by political party leaders as weapons for defence and attack according to the interest of their particular party. Analysis on both textual and pragmatic features of preamble and question in Cameron's questioning discourse has proved Paul Chilton's assertion—'in the production of parliamentary discourse, form is important, but performance is crucial' (Chilton, 2004:108). Discursive strategies used by David Cameron in preamble and question have a clear orientation to get the better of the PM, further projecting progressive and resolute modern Conservative leadership representative of the British general public.

The second part of analysis focuses on Cameron's questioning performance in constructing ideological consensus and conflict with the PM and Labour government in PMQ adversarial discourse; meanwhile effectively delivering the reforming Conservative party ideology to the public. First and foremost, the balanced distribution of questioning themes for ideological consensus and conflict clearly demonstrates Cameron's presentation of the Conservative party as reasonable centre-right party, backing the government on policies for benefits the public and country and attacking the government on the policies of the opposite political effect.

On typical themes of women and ethnic minority for constructing ideological consensus, Cameron's questioning discourse accentuates strong support for Muslim community and voluntary organizations for helping women. This discourse feature vividly reflects the wide socio-political context that Cameron as a new Tory leader determines to refresh the Conservative identity to represent of all citizens in Britain. On typical themes of sex offence crime and education for showing ideological conflict, Cameron's questioning discourse accentuates the Conservative party's resolution to implement serious progressive measures, and willingness to share information and responsibility with the public.

Hence, David Cameron's questioning discourse effectively presents the reforming party ideology of Compassionate Conservatism, which is a coherent mixture of one-nation Conservatism discourse and modern liberalism discourse. Meanwhile, through questioning utterances, Cameron also successfully projects a 'modern, progressive, liberal, mainstream'¹⁹ Conservative leadership image.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

This paper has analyzed David Cameron's questioning performance in PMQ genre at both the macro and the micro discourse level. It is argued in this study that preamble and question are two elements of crucial significance for combating the PM in PMQ interactions and projecting a new image of Conservative party and Tory leadership. Through television transmission, Cameron's use of language plays an essential role in presenting reforming party ideology of Compassionate Conservatism to the British general public. The desired image of modern, Compassionate Conservative party is built up in Cameron's questioning discourse as a party fulfilling traditional values and fostering new thinking.

Although there is limitation on data selection, analysis in this study has explicated the

essential role of question with its special pragmatic functions in shaping political debate and political process in the British parliament. Thus, this research maintains that future studies on contemporary political discourse should pay emphasis on not only political answers, but also political questions. Based on the dialectic relationship between language and politics, this study acknowledges that the PMQ genre is a vital channel for examining perspectives and realities of political parties.

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Appendix

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12. 'Theresa May's Conference Speech', *Guardian Unlimited*, 7 Oct 2002,

<http://politics.guardian.co.uk/tories2002/story/0,,806370,00.html>.

13. <http://www.number-10.gov.uk/output/page1.asp>.

14. *Cameron-Blair initial exchange in the House of Commons, 1 Nov, 2006.*

DC: Today hundreds of health workers will be lobbying in Parliament worried about deficits, worried about cuts and worried about low morale in our health service. The government's chief medical officer.

MS: Order, let the right hon. gentleman speak.

DC: Members do not like hearing about Labour cuts in our NHS. The government's chief medical officer has said evidence from within the NHS tells a consistent story for public health of poor morale, declining numbers, inadequate recruitment and budgets being raided to solve financial deficits. Was the chief medical officer speaking for the government?

PM: Let me tell him what is actually happening within the NHS. There are 400,000 fewer people on waiting lists than there were in 1997, waiting times for cataracts and heart operations are down, people now get their cancer treatment on time, and there are 300,000 more staff in the NHS. If he wants the best evidence of improvement in the NHS, someone said this morning: 'if you were to say to me is the NHS better now than it was in 1997, I think there have been improvements.' Who was that? The shadow health spokesman.

DC: What about the chief medical officer, who advises the government? As ever, the PM never answers the question. Let us hear from someone else in the NHS. The

chairman of the British Medical Association says: 'This year has seen vitally needed healthcare professionals losing their jobs.' He says that he is 'dismayed' by what he calls 'the incoherence of current government policies and the damage they have caused to the NHS'. Did the PM ever think that after nine years of Labour government, morale would be so low in the NHS?

PM: The comprehensive report on the health service was published by the Healthcare Commission just a few days ago. This is what it says: there are real improvements to applaud and celebrate. Patients are seeing real improvements to health care services in England and Wales. They are waiting less time for treatments. There are now more doctors, more nurses and more health care professionals. Of course changes are taking place in the NHS, and rightly, because more cases are being dealt with as day cases, new technology is shortening waiting times, specialist care is being developed, and more is being done in primary care settings now. All that is part of necessary change. The Conservative party, having first opposed all the investment in the NHS, now apparently also opposes reform. The only way in which the NHS will improve is if we keep the money coming in, not cut it back, which is his policy, and make sure that we make the reforms to get value for money.

DC: The health service professionals are not here protesting about our policies; they are protesting about his cuts. If the PM will not listen to people within the health service, will he listen to his own health guru, Sir Derek Wanless? Derek Wanless told the Chancellor that the money could have been better spent. We now have an account of how the conversation went. Sir Derek said to the Chancellor that the government's policies since 1997 had made the NHS worse. There was then an uncomfortable silence... Brown was no longer interested in the conversation. Does that sound all familiar to the PM?

PM: There is one issue: whether the NHS has got better since 1997 as a result of the

investment and reform. Now, even the right hon. Gentleman's own shadow health spokesman admits that it has. It has got better because we got the largest ever hospital building programme under way. It has got better because there are more staff in the NHS. It has got better because the very targets that he wants to scrap are resulting in reduced waiting times and reduced waiting lists. Yes, it is true that there are real difficulties in the NHS—of course there are. There are bound to be when we undergo a process of change. The right hon. Gentleman says that staff are protesting about our policy, not his, but that is hardly surprising when we look at what his policy is. I was just about to indicate why we would not follow it

DC: For once, the PM admits that there are real difficulties in the NHS. Are not the real failings in the NHS due to bungled contracts, endless reorganizations and top-down targets? Are not those the hallmarks of the Chancellor of the Exchequer?

PM: The reason why we have managed to get waiting times and waiting lists down, why people are being treated for cancer far quicker and why we have 150,000 fewer deaths from heart disease since 1997 is precisely that we have laid down targets for minimum treatment. If the right hon. gentleman is saying that he is going to get rid of targets inside the NHS, that will mean that those patients who are currently guaranteed proper waiting times and treatment, or who are guaranteed that when they go to accident and emergency departments, for example, they can be seen quickly, will no longer have those standards. If that is his policy, he is not merely committed to cutting the investment in the health service, but to taking away the very minimum standards that have delivered the improvements that his own health spokesman admits to.

15. <http://www.conservative.com>.

16. *Cameron's questioning discourse on themes of women and ethnic minority for showing ideological consensus.*

As the PM has just said, the demonstrations in London over the weekend caused widespread concern. Muslims, as he has also just said, contribute an enormous amount to this country and, for the overwhelming majority, Islam is a religion of peace. Does he agree that, in all of this, there is a danger that their voice will be drowned out?

On the specific point of policing that the PM just mentioned, we all agree that the existing laws on incitement must be enforced. Does he agree that while smart policing may mean holding back from arresting people on the spot, it must never mean turning a blind eye to those who incite violence, or perhaps even worse? (*House of Commons, 8 Feb 2006*)

This week marks the anniversary of the first suicide bombing attacks in Britain. The whole country will remember the 52 people of all faiths and none who were killed and the hundreds who were wounded. Of the 500 victims who have applied for compensation, almost 300 are still waiting for final settlement. Does the PM agree that those people should not have to wait so long?

Yesterday, the PM was right to emphasize the role that the Muslim community itself should play in helping to root out extremism, but we all have a role to play in helping to foster a greater sense of common citizenship. Does the PM agree that we need an ambitious nationwide programme, including youth volunteering and school exchanges, as part of that? Does he further agree that such a programme would work best with the participation of all parties right from the start? And will he make sure that that happens in all cases in future? (*House of Commons, 5 Jul, 2006*)

The 200th anniversary of the ending of the slave trade in the British Empire is the right time to acknowledge the pain and devastation that was caused by that evil trade.

Does the PM agree that the bicentenary should also be a reminder of those who are still suffering slavery in our world today? Will he confirm that 120,000 women are trafficked for sex in Europe every year and that some European countries have named Britain as the No. 1 destination? Does he think that that is accurate?

I am delighted that the PM will be signing the EU convention, as we suggested earlier this year. Does the PM agree that one of the most useful things that we can do to end this sickening trade is to ensure that when women flee their captors, there is a safe place for them to go? Will he join me in praising the work of voluntary sector organizations, such as Sister Ann Teresa's, that provide safe places up and down the country? Instead of listening to the man who is about to go off to the power station, will he make sure that the Government do all that they can to support those excellent voluntary bodies? (*House of Commons, 21 Mar, 2007*)

17. *Cameron's questioning discourse on theme of fighting sex offence crime for showing ideological conflicts.*

For months, the government have been briefing the tabloid newspapers that they would introduce Sarah's law. The headlines reported 'stunning victory' and that Sarah's law would 'start in months'. This afternoon, the Home Secretary will announce that Sarah's law will not be introduced. Is the PM at all surprised that the press are cynical about his government?

I have to say to the PM that he knows exactly what his government were doing, and he knows exactly how disgraceful it can be ... The headlines of the tabloids today are screaming out about 'chemical castration for pedophiles', but if we listen to what the Home Secretary said on the radio, it is about giving a few of them Prozac pills. Let us look at something that would really make a difference in terms of stopping sex offenders preying on children. After the dreadful Soham murders, there was the Bichard report, which recommended a system for the police to share information so that we could stop more sex offenders more quickly. The Home Secretary said that

that information sharing system would be ready this year. Will the PM tell us whether that promise will be kept?

The PM has completely failed to answer the question. The fact is that the Home Secretary told us that the system would be in place this year, and it is not going to be. Is that not completely typical of the way in which this government operates? Initiatives that are never going to happen are endlessly spun to the media, but when it comes to serious measures that would really help to protect our children from sex offenders, this government are completely incompetent at introducing them. Will the PM confirm today that the full system of information sharing recommended by Bichard will not be introduced for another three years, until at least 2010—yes or no? (*House of Commons, 13 Jun, 2007*)

Yesterday, the police revealed that details of British criminals, including rapists and murderers, who have committed offences abroad were sitting in boxes in the Home Office and that nothing had been done. Can the PM at least reassure us that all their details have now been entered on the police national computer and, where appropriate, the sex offenders register?

Let us be clear about what the PM has just said: the names of those people have been sitting in box files and he is admitting today that not all their details have been put on the police national computer. The PM has confirmed that yet again the government have failed in their central duty to protect the public. Let us also be clear: of the 525 serious criminals, there are 25 rapists, 29 pedophiles and five murderers. Can the PM guarantee that none of those very dangerous people has been working with children since their conviction?

Let us be clear: I asked the PM for a guarantee and he simply cannot give one. His answer underlines just how serious this is. There are rapists, murderers and pedophiles at large in Britain who could have got through the net and could have been working

with children in the NHS, in social services or in our schools. The PM says that the Home Secretary will give a statement, but is not it the fact that the Home Office is part of the problem? Last night, the Home Office said that details of the serious offenders had all been entered into the computer—that is what they said. This morning, a Home Office Minister said that they had not all been entered. Why does the Home Office keep giving such misleading information about such an important matter?

The PM has completely failed to answer the question. Why is it that last night the Home Office said one thing, but this morning the junior Minister said something completely different? On taking office, the Home Secretary said that he would have a fundamental review of his Department. A hundred days later he said, 'Job done', yet we now know that 500 criminals are on the loose and his Department did virtually nothing about it. Is not it the case that if one of those dangerous criminals is found to have been working with vulnerable adults or with children, the Home Secretary will not be able to run away from responsibility for it? (*House of Commons*, 10 Jan, 2007)

18. 'Argument rages over Sarah's law: why parents' key demand is rejected by police', 31 Dec 2001, <http://society.guardian.co.uk/children/story/0,,618198,00.html>.
19. 'Meet David Cameron—a Modern, Progressive, Liberal, Mainstream Conservative', *Conservative Home*, 16 Dec 2005, http://conservativehome.blogs.com/torydiary/2005/12/meet_david_came.html.